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SOLDIERING

BY FRED REED

U.S., allies suffer spy 'hemorrhage'

Yesterday I was talking to an officer of my acquaintance, and the conversation turned to the question of espionage. Bob, we'll call him — it does an officer's career no good to go on record with unpleasant truths about spying — is badly concerned about the loss of classified material to the Soviets. So is nearly everyone in the officer corps, if my decidedly unscientific sampling means anything.



Bob is concerned about espionage in part because he is aware of it, and he is concerned because the public is not aware. Media members in this country do not talk about espionage. Stories tend to consist of one or two paragraphs on page 11, of the form, "A sailor at Norfolk was charged today with passing key electronics of the AIM-54C guidance system to Soviet agents. The missile is carried by the F-14 fighter, which is deployed on carriers." End of story. The implications are never mentioned.

As Bob heatedly pointed out, it should nonetheless be apparent to anyone who reads carefully that there is a "hemorrhage" of secret information from the United States and allied countries. He is right that it should be apparent. Every few years it turns out that someone in the upper ranks of NATO's staff is working for East German intelligence. So often does British intelligence turn out to be run by Soviet agents, one might assume that working for the KGB is a condition of employment. In the United States, the papers report in very fine print that organizations from the CIA to defense contractors leak like sieves. This isn't speculation: It is on the record.

"What puzzles me is why the media doesn't pay any attention to what is going on," Bob said. The theory that reporters are Communist agents just isn't tenable, but you'd never know it by the way they act. Don't they know this stuff is important? Stupidity can't explain it, either. Everybody says reporters are stupid, but that's just kicking the dog when you're mad.

"I just wish people would try looking at it (espionage) from a service guy's point of view. You can lose a war — easily lose a war — because of espionage. You can get a war going because of it. Remember Jimmy Carter's hide-the-MX idea in all those shelters out West? All Soviet intel has to do is find out where the damned missiles are at any given time — and they get that kind of penetration in lots of places, you read it in the papers — and the whole shelter business is useless.

"What about the poor slob sitting in a tank in Germany? If the Warsaw Pact knows exactly what NATO plans to do if it gets attacked, then they're going to plan for it, and that poor dumb tanker is going to be super dead in a hurry. The only thing that's going to keep me alive is my black boxes. If the Soviets know what I've got in them — and I'll bet they do — they'll counteract them and I get blown out of the air. I really need that.

"I keep reading that some missile is destabilizing. Maybe it is. Strategic stuff isn't easy to figure, at least not if you're the one who has to do it. Why doesn't anyone think how destabilizing intel is? Suppose the Russians got word of just where the boomers (missile-launching subs) were going to be. Maybe that's impossible; maybe not even the Navy knows. Suppose they did. There goes deterrence. The same goes for NATO. If the other side knows enough then he can't lose. It must be a temptation.

"Why doesn't the press even talk about any of this? I think they're all afraid of getting accused of McCarthyism. You know how that would go. If any officer dared to speak out about what's going on, or tried to do something about it, he'd get run out of the service. I think reporters are the same way. They're afraid their buddies would call them fascists. So much for security."

Well, actually — yes.